

## Economic Development Advisory Council

### 4.24.13 Meeting minutes

#### Americana Room – Hampshire Hills

##### **Present:**

Matt Ciardelli, Ciardelli Fuel Co  
Chris Costantino, Conservation Commission  
Mark Fougere, Board of Selectmen  
Tracy Hutchins, DO-IT  
Janet Langdell, Planning Board  
Heather Leach, Centrix Bank  
John McCormack, TIFD  
Penny Seaver, Bean Seaver & Smith  
Sean Trombly, Trombly Gardens  
Dale White, Leighton A White, Inc.

##### **Excused:**

George Infanti, Milford Paint  
Michael Brisebois, Hitchiner Mfg Co  
Rosie Deloge, Milford School System

Bill Parker, Director Community Development  
Shirley Wilson, Recording secretary

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M. Ciardelli called the meeting to order at 7:30AM and reviewed the minutes from the February meeting.

##### **Minutes:**

J. Langdell made one correction to the minutes to state that she was absent. H. Leach made a motion to accept the minutes from 2/20/13. J. McCormack seconded and all in favor.

##### **Update on Current Work Efforts:**

##### **Policies and Procedures:**

J. McCormack said we've collected the information from the surveys and the results are in. The important thing to remember for any survey, is that you can collect information but you don't get the insight until you engage the people giving the feedback in conversation. We collected more useful information through discussions and hopefully we will be in a position that we can act on and there was a general reluctance to fill out the survey for fear of retribution. Our next step will be to get into further discussion with Guy regarding the results and give him the solid information he has been asking for. Overall, the Milford departments are doing a good job; can we do a better job, yes. Are there areas for further improvement; certainly. He then referenced a few of the comments:

- *Concern with the strictness of the Town's application of the energy codes, making it \$5,000 to \$10,000 more expensive than surrounding towns to build in Milford.*
- *There needs to be some flexibility to address code requirements in the field.*
- *Taking a week or two weeks to approve plans where other towns provide same day service; don't see a need to scrutinize plans when the inspectors see everything out in the field.* There seems to be a mixed message in that customers want quick approval for the plans but don't want to have to make corrections out in the field after its built.
- *Concern that the Building inspector has become more of a code enforcer than a safety inspector.* You don't want to be part of a project that fails or causes injury. The codes are so vast and numerous and they are constantly changing and challenging our inspectors. Our inspectors are people who are trying to do the right thing. They have to be and are certified, but they are not professional engineers. They have varying degrees of experience in their background therefore, there will inevitably be some variation of interpretation. There is also some variation from town to town to the level of enforcement. It's not always black and white.

J McCormack said when he and Dale met with Hitchiner on the \$10M project, the overall results were favorable, but there were a couple of areas where costly changes were requested upon first interpretation for the fire alarm and ADA compliance; however, upon reflection an effective, working compromise was arrived at. Furthermore, those projects who had the resources to hire professionals experienced the least amount of glitches. Also, as Matt stated, sometimes this comes down to personality versus process. All that being said, there was good learning from this endeavor.

B. Parker said the results have been compiled and this was briefly mentioned at the department staff meeting yesterday. Copies of the results will be provided to EDAC and all departments. He felt there were a few areas to look at;

- Determine the magnitude of the fear of repercussion that people seem to have and how to address that.
- Look at the reasons for delays in plan review.
- Look at our internal processes; the implementation, document submittal.
- Look at the code requirements; mandated versus something we'd like to have and a good point was made to look at the requirements for plot plans.
- Look at the overall communications and public relations. How do we get the word out to use the website?
- Customer service was rated very high for people coming into the office.

M. Ciardelli said we've talked to a broad spectrum of people and got a lot of feedback and some very good points have come out of this survey. The next big step though will be how to take the information forward and implement changes.

D. White said we keep referencing talking to Guy and that he needs the evidence. This was a difficult survey because many didn't want to talk and only talked out of respect that we wouldn't throw them under the bus. Also, Guy is the avenue to get to the Selectmen and they are the ones who need to hear this. This group has met for three years and the strides that have been made are awesome, but at the same time, some of the same points from that original roundtable are still apparent issues today. It's a tough job to be a building inspector and it is a no win job. There are rules, regulations, and ordinances in all our lives, but it is how you handle them. There are many gray areas and he has heard that the inspectors are unbending. There needs to be some guidance and continuity and if or when sensitive issues arise, there needs to be some discussion. M. Ciardelli said that is the opportunity. J. Langdell said it is also an opportunity to encourage professional growth for staff and there may be some avenues available to staff to help with the decision making process, how to compromise and when to take it to the next level. J. McCormack said it also involves the judgment question of how to interpret the codes and how to find the balance. M. Ciardelli said we should think about this more from a business aspect where you have to allow your good or reliable customers to have a little more flexibility and a broader interpretation because those are the people who drive our community. J. McCormack added that we are not looking to compromise on safety but to find a more effective way. D. White said he also heard from these builders, who build throughout the area, that overall they like coming to Milford and they get treated well, but there are fixable glitches. He referenced a situation where the Fire Department was unyielding until the chief got involved and it became more fair. In this economy, time is of the essence and no one is pointing fingers, but we need to do better.

J. Langdell inquired when the summary would be ready for distribution. J. McCormack said the summary is written but we want to show it to Guy before distribution. Discussion followed.

J. Langdell noted that people talked about retribution but we all know that is part of the survey world. It would be interesting to see if there is any type of measurement for general fear associated with surveys. Let's put it in a bigger picture so it's clear. D. White stated that the report contains the survey results and the interview results.

M. Fougere said he didn't have a problem with submitting the results to Guy first, because the Selectmen want to see what Guy sees. This has been issue in front of the Selectmen for a while, as Bill knows, and we've had some very direct discussion with the building department. It is still in our goals and having been in the development field for more than twenty years he has seen many aspects and heard both sides. It is a real concern of the community because time is money and there is a real fear of retribution for delayed inspections, C/O's and other economic concerns. The fears may not be real, but the concerns are. The ambulance building committee will also be making a report to the Selectmen on the building process that will have some critical comments so we'll be adding to that survey. These comments are fixable. There is black and white and a lot of gray when it comes to the code, but to fall back on the most conservative way it where I have a concern. I am glad we are doing this and having concrete examples from this survey is what we need. It will help Bill and his staff .

There was discussion regarding the BOS presentation. H. Leach noted that we will be on TV so when we present to the BOS we don't want to augment that perception that everything needs to be fixed, we should present all the findings with a balance. It will be good for people to see we're addressing the bad things but it's also really good for people to see what our strengths are and that we are helpful and friendly when you need to come in to the

office. We should think of this as business and use it as a marketing tool. We could even put the web address up during the presentation. D. White agreed with Mark saying that the problems are very fixable and despite personalities we can meet in the middle.

### **Economic Development Survey Committee**

H. Leach said this came about as we tried to put together an economic development policy statement but we don't know what the town wants? So we combined questions from surveys we found online and created this survey to get the pulse of the community. We want to make recommendations that reflect the views of the businesses and residents to the Select Board so that when we look at planning, the master plan, and taxes, we have all those pieces. Some of the questions are what would you be willing to do to get economic growth and what would you be willing to pay for to get economic growth? What kind of growth are you looking for; none, a big box store or do you want apartments? Do you want a large manufacturer? If so, then you need to have everything that supports a large manufacturer such as education and infrastructure. Hopefully the results will give us a good direction to go to the Select Board with and this is what should guide us. Some of what is in our master plan is dated, over twenty-five years old. Our target is to get this survey out to 500 individuals that way we can get a broad range of input. J. Langdell noted that 300-400 responses were received when we sent out the Vision statement survey years ago. H. Leach said it will be available on paper in multiple locations or can be completed online, although we have selected the format yet, and we are asking EDAC to also get this out to 10-15 people because we want to hit the soccer moms, the retirees, and the business owners. When it comes time to vote, they are the individuals who will be approving our recommendations otherwise this will be a waste of our time.

T. Hutchins said they've been meeting for a few months to put this together, but would like this group to look at the questions just to see if something was missed or if some clarity is needed. J. McCormack asked if the results and interpretations were reviewed when you chose the questions. H. Leach explained their process and said we drew the majority of questions from Washington State, Canada and county surveys rather than the size of the community. J. Langdell added that questions were taken based on the structure and direction of where we were trying to go with this. H. Leach said we are hoping to see if the business owners' responses will be different from the general public's responses so our vehicle needs to make sure we can drill down to that level. M. Fougere said it is important that the survey be on the first page of the website if it goes online and also a link on the Library's page. T. Hutchins added that there was much discussion on how to get the word out; the town and MIT websites, and going to different groups to speak. H. Leach added that there are many ways to get word out; we can make pitches to the BOS, the Planning Board, the Rotary, the Cabinet, and do a short add on GTM, a QR code for mobile phones. T. Hutchins reminded everyone that comments are due back by May 1<sup>st</sup> so that we can get the survey out by May 15<sup>th</sup>. We'd like to have it at the Taste of Milford in June, especially if there is a way to capture the people in line waiting. The plant sale in May would also be another venue.

### **Joint Planning Board / Board of Selectmen / EDAC Worksession**

J. Langdell inquired if EDAC would use this meeting as an opportunity to bring the P & P survey data and talk specifically about those results. D. White clarified that what really spawned this meeting was the letter Bill sent after the first St Joe's preliminary meeting with the Planning Board in response to the Cabinet's article. As a citizen I was disappointed with the negative feedback that came from such a positive project. Here the EDAC group is spending time to recruit businesses to Milford, so how do we all the diversified groups get on the same page? J. Langdell said back in 2008, the Planning Board organized the very first joint meeting and it was the Planning Board that brought this group together although chartered by the BOS. The Planning Board is very much concerned with economic development; however, that said, our role has a tenuous balance, while we want to do things that will attract, improve and foster business, we also have a responsibility to a larger community and we do have rules and regulations in place that we need to respect and abide by but we have enough waiver clauses to massage those gray areas. On the Planning Board's work plan, we have wanted to get together with the Select Board and EDAC to see if our individual directions are dovetailing with each other and with the bigger picture. When I got the email about St Joe's, it seem like an opportune time to move this meeting forward where we will get to each board's expectations, which might be very different. She asked if Dale watched the meeting and stated that she personally came out of that meeting feeling that it was communicated and made crystal clear by more than one board member that we want St Joe's here. They are a great asset, not just for the town of Milford but for the entire Souhegan Valley and reiterated that was clearly mentioned. It was the details of the architectural and the layout of the lot that was what really needed to be discussed and I am glad they're doing more community outreach and the Board is looking forward to them coming back. I also got feedback from the

residents in the area about the meeting and article. They were glad the Board was taking a balanced approach. D. White said he was invited to the subsequent St Joe's meeting for the residents and they did take into consideration some of what was discussed by the Planning Board.

B. Parker said he envisioned the joint meeting to help provide some guidance to the Selectmen. Each year economic development is one of their goals, but it's not defined further. This meeting is an opportunity for the Planning Board to report the broad range of projects and plans its working on and for EDAC to report on the work they are doing and trying to develop an economic development policy. It is an opportunity to give some strong background to the Selectmen and get everybody on the same page.

M. Fougere said there needs to be a strong agenda to be able to come out with some conclusions when we're done. I also think that the survey results should not be discussed at this meeting; that would be better for EDAC to discuss them at a Selectmen's meeting.

H. Leach suggested that a neutral party run the meeting so that it had some direction. Mike Brisebois and Rosie Deloge were suggested as the meeting facilitator. D. White reiterated that the goal should be what is best for Milford. Bill will contact Mike initially and then Rosie if he isn't available. B. Parker said the theme could be *Ensuring Milford's prosperity, a collaborative effort*. D. White said it's all about awareness.

J. Langdell suggested that each group bring their mission/goals and the respective group's objectives for the upcoming year. The second part would be a discussion about working together for the same purpose and if we are working towards a united theme for Milford. Is it Milford's future, or prosperity, or economic development? I understand that the Selectmen have a huge amount of details before them but I struggle with the lack of substance with economic development at the policy level. The term Marketing Milford has been referenced on several occasions; EDAC is doing this and MIT is doing this, but it seems to be piecemeal. We haven't seemed to capture the direction for all of us to jump on and drive Milford's prosperity. T. Hutchins said this new survey may be helpful to that purpose and the results may give the groups some direction. Maybe we could possibly move the joint meeting out a month or so. B. Parker agreed that those results would provide a good knowledge base for the meeting. M. Fougere reiterated that the meeting has to be focused on specific topics and the purpose be clear so that we can determine what our obstacles are and what direction we should be moving in. So, in that respect, it might be good to move the meeting date to get the results. Economic development should always be in the forefront but the reality is that the private market will decide if who comes to Milford or not, based on a whole host of issues outside our influences. Cost, location, transportation network all play an important part and do we have things in place to accommodate the emerging uses? He then referenced Brox and said until the economy is ready for it, there is nothing we can do that will change that property.

D. White asked if we should, as a community or town, put together a contingency of ambassadors to meet with developers, realtors and engineering firms? We've talked to the businesses in town and want them to stay, but what would it take to bring people to town. Also, what would it take to get a list of available land to put on the website or obtained at the town hall? J. McCormack said one of the comments from the P & P survey was from Hitchiner who said it was gratifying that the town was reaching out and inquiring. They felt appreciated as a customer, so we need to continue doing that with the businesses we already have. J. Langdell said that many other communities have done exactly what Dale brought up. Is it time that Milford gets dedicated funding and staff time for these type of efforts? It is a wonderful idea to have ambassadors but that would also imply that there are other pieces to make it a successful endeavor. T. Hutchins said she agreed that we need the ambassadors and larger towns do this successfully because they have a dedicated economic development director. I think it's a little premature at this time; we still don't have an economic development policy and we don't know if all three Boards are on the same page to have a clear direction to teach the ambassadors. J. Langdell again inquired how do we accomplish this, by the end of the year. T. Hutchins said the survey is a good first step to take the temperature of the town. We don't really know what the taxpayers want. The second step would be the meeting and then discussion on the timeframe ensued.

D. White said another idea for discussion at the meeting would be to address how do departments communicate and resolve issues and how does information get communicated to the individuals within the departments. B. Parker said he can't speak for other departments, but we hold monthly staff meetings to communicate broader issues. In our office, we're always talking about these issues throughout the day, every day. There is no broad

system or structure to communicate information. C. Costantino said working in Bill's office, she hears the evolving discussions and their process is constantly adapting to what issues come in each day. The development department at the Town Hall is very adaptive and responsive, so putting something on paper can sometimes slow the "process" down.

#### **Community Development Office / Planning Board / MIT reports**

B. Parker said there really is a lot of activity going on in Milford.

- Fresenius Medical Center, a \$740,000, project is open at Lorden Plaza.
- Pine Valley Mill, a complicated \$5.5M project, is awaiting the closings.
- Airmar's \$5M project is well under construction
- CoorsTek addition and renovations are under review.
- Francetown Village Foods is relocating to the Granite Town Plaza, employing 20 people.
- The new Ambulance facility is underway.
- Hutchinson Point, the senior housing project received Planning Board approval.
- The Milford Medical Center, which we talked about is coming back to the Planning Board.
- Barbour renovations, a \$264,000 project, is beginning at the Meadowbrook Dr location.
- There is no homebuilding to speak of and there are very few homes on the market. P. Seaver noted that there were only forty some homes on the market in Milford and all towns are down.

T. Hutchins mentioned that the Preservation Alliance approached Janet and Bill a few months ago about the old train station off Cottage St. It turns out that it is more historic than originally thought as it is an architecturally unique freight house so they brought it to the MIT. We've had discussion and got to go inside those buildings. We applied for and received a grant for a Plan NH charrette. That is a big deal as they only accept two or three towns per year. The charrette will be held on November 1 & 2, 2013, bringing in planning professionals to address not just how to preserve and restore those buildings, but what those buildings can be used for and to also look at the entire area. That was a very dynamic neighborhood years ago and this will look at traffic and streetscape for the entire neighborhood including the redevelopment possibilities and the connection to Elm St and the Oval. The grant is worth 50,000 but Plan NH does ask us to provide \$5,000 which supports their organization and to arrange for meals and hotel rooms for the two days. The \$6,500 is not included in the MIT budget, but we have committed to \$2,500. We are hoping to get the remaining funds from supporters and we are working with Mr. Fuller who has been very agreeable. J. McCormack brought up Jack Dugan's name and offered to pass the information along to him. T. Hutchins said the charrette will be a good first step and even if we are not able to use the information that comes out of this for those two particular train station buildings, the Town will benefit from the information and it will be good for the area going forward. C. Costantino inquired about the scope of the area that will be looked at. T. Hutchins said that has not really been defined yet. J. Langdell said the Rail Trail connection to Keyes Field has been brought up in discussion and went on to thank the Milford Improvement Team for taking this on and moving this project forward. H. Leach said Tracy spent a lot of time on this and it is a project that will evolve over the next 10-15 years. It will be a huge resource and any funding help would be greatly appreciated. C. Costantino asked if this could get on the website to drive further interest because there are a lot of people who care and would possibly make private donations.

The next EDAC meeting was scheduled for 6/19/13.

The joint meeting date originally scheduled for 5/20/13 will be determined when a facilitator is available and when the survey results come in.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00AM